

Sermon – The Road Back

Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him. So Jesus went to the Pharisee's home and got ready to eat. When a sinful woman in that town found out that Jesus was there, she bought an expensive bottle of perfume. Then she came and stood behind Jesus. She cried and started washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. The woman kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this and said to himself, "If this man really were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him! He would know that she is a sinner." Jesus said to the Pharisee, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher, what is it?" Simon replied. Jesus told him, "Two people were in debt to a moneylender. One of them owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. Since neither of them could pay him back, the moneylender said that they didn't have to pay him anything. Which one of them will like him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose it would be the one who had owed more and didn't have to pay it back." "You are right," Jesus said. He turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Have you noticed this woman? When I came into your home, you didn't give me any water so I could wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn't even pour olive oil on my head, but she has poured expensive perfume on my feet. So I tell you that all her sins are forgiven, and that is why she has shown great love. But anyone who has been forgiven for only a little will show only a little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Some other guests started saying to one another, "Who is this who dares to forgive sins?" But Jesus told the woman, "Because of your faith, you are now saved. May God (the Father) give you peace.

This morning, we see a woman who had come to value what Jesus offers each one of us.

This woman was hurt, she was damaged-goods, she had led a life of sin and had earned the scorn of the church for it. We can clearly see this when the Pharisee says: "If this man really were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him! He would know that she is a sinner."

This statement tells us two very important things...

- 1) The church had labeled this woman a sinner
 - a. They became her judge instead of loving her
- 2) The Pharisee had condemned Jesus for his action
 - a. He was mocking Jesus as the Royal Prophet of the day even though he invited him into his home. Where is the love and the spirit of hospitality in this scenario?

Further we see in Jesus story that the woman was responding in love, because she had come to realize how much he was offering into her life. She had much to be forgiven for, but he did not condemn her, not did he condone her sin. He simply forgave her and loved her.

I often wonder how many of us in our lives start down paths and make the same mistakes over and over again. How many here today have heard someone say this person or that person is in a cycle of poverty? Do you think it possible that when a person has bashed their head against the wall, so many times, they finally get fed up with banging their head?

Into this picture walks Jesus, who gives life and liberty and shows them a better way...

This creates two scenes, played out in real life...

- 1) The person loves God just as Christ has described here and loves him so much because they realize how much he has done for them.
- 2) The person blames God for their evil of men and women in their life and becomes embittered toward God for what they perceive is his allowing the bad things to happen.

Our lives are like a picture that we paint. We are the painter and Jesus is the teacher. We make choices about color, texture, brush, stroke and so on... But the canvas of our lives is our own...

Now Jesus stands ready to provide advice, to repair the mistakes, to mentor and lead the painter is creating a masterpiece.

We can either paint it ourselves or we can ask for help...

Here is what the woman realized... Jesus can give her a new canvas.

He can give her beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.... Sometimes he shows us how to turn a mistake into a beautiful feature. Sometimes he scumbles over a portion of the painting and teaches us so that we can create a new image in place of what embarrassed us. And other times, he let's us begin again, bringing with us the knowledge of what to do to make it beautiful.

How our lives turn out depends on the choices we make, we can make them with him or without him. When we work with him we learn and develop beyond what we could have accomplished alone. Without him, we can feel disappointment.

How can we blame the teacher for the choices we make? Simply put, we can't but we try... We can however always turn to the teacher and ask for help

God gave us all free will to choose our lives and to choose to serve him or not. We are free to choose, but not free of the consequences of our actions.

The beautiful thing here is that although this woman had a bad reputation, although the church scorned her, she came to realize that what she needed was Jesus. No matter her past, she respected and honored Jesus with all that she had, with the most precious of her treasures, she washed his feet with her tears and dried his feet with her hair.

Simon was in error... He was righteous in his own mind... I imagine that his thought process went something like this:

- If Jesus is a prophet, he would know this woman is a sinner
- If Jesus is a righteous man he would have nothing to do with her
- If Jesus did not know the woman was a sinner and touches her or allows him to touch her, he cannot be a prophet, and I can reject him and his teachings and I can feel I have done my due diligence and wash my hands of yet another false messiah.

Would you agree that Simon is making a lot of assumptions?

Do people make assumptions today?

- Would Jesus dance?
- Would Jesus drink wine?
- Would Jesus embrace liberal churches or scorn them?
- Would Jesus love Gays or hate them?
- Would Jesus condone divorce?

I am not trying to nor and I going to start an argument. My point here is that we ALL have an opinion and we may even have solid scriptural substantiation to back up our position.

Did Simon quote the scriptures? Just a thought but as a Pharisee, I am sure that he could have thrown out many passages on staying away from unholy things...

Using scripture is not necessarily a bad thing.... But we need to ask ourselves: Are we quoting in context? Have we really studied this out? (Or) Are we making Jesus against the same things we are against? Are we trying to make him in our image? Or are we looking at all aspects of Jesus truth?

Bad theology emphasizes on aspect of a truth but ignores the others...

God's moral law is clear... Love God, Love all people – Hate their sin.

Simon the Pharisee's logic is good, but it is based on a false assumption. He assumes that holiness is a matter of physical separation. Based on his assumption, Jesus would have to avoid sinners to stay holy. Based on this premise either:

- 1) Jesus didn't know this woman's character
- 2) Jesus was contaminated by her sin and couldn't be holy

What does all this mean to you and me right here and right now!

It means that it is all well and good to emphasize God's holiness and his high moral standards about what is holy, but... it totally ignores the aspect of his truth... It ignores his compassion, his unrelenting love of people. But when we only embrace half of his truth it focuses on the mess they have made of their lives.

Simon seems to have led a life more holy than the woman. He failed to recognize that he was one of the debtors... She sought the lord and was forgiven, he wasn't

Let's look closely at this woman again. The woman may have been sinful but she sought out the Lord Jesus with her whole heart. Based on her past and the attitude of the church we can infer from Simon, she probably wasn't a regular church attendee. Her actions were full of sin, but we see her heart is loving.

Isn't it interesting that her life and her heart relationship with the Lord did not line up... Isn't it interesting that in this case the sinful woman is more in touch with Jesus than the Pharisee. How many think, her life lines up after this event?

Friends, isn't it interesting that even before Jesus says he forgives her of her sin. Further, she loved him... before he even forgives her - he says:

Verse 47 says: "So I tell you that all her sins are forgiven, and that is why she has shown great love. But anyone who has been forgiven for only a little will show only a little love"

Even before he told her in words, he said he forgave her sin. He looked into her heart and for Jesus that was what mattered. Jesus had forgiven her even before she knew it...

We can judge a Christian by the fruit of the Spirit produced in their lives, but we cannot tell if a person is a Christian based on church attendance, reputation or actions...

Here is the bottom line... only Jesus sees our heart and that is where it is settled.

This morning, I know there are many here today who have led Godly lives, free of reproach, alcohol, drugs, sexual sins and so on. To you I say: "Praise God, well done"

good and faithful servant.” To those of you like me who have not lead perfect lives, I say: “Enter now into the peace and love of the Lord.”

We are not saved by works...

Friends, ultimately it doesn't matter what I say on this because of this one fact:

Jesus is the judge of your heart and mine this morning. My job and yours is to love.

Can you see this morning how this woman came to realize that her life was in chaos because of her choices? Circumstances may have impacted her choices but they were still her choices. Regardless of the sin, the actions, the bad reputation and so on, we can clearly see a woman who doesn't want to go around the cycle again and so she embraces Jesus with her whole heart and accepts his love and forgiveness.

Are we grateful this morning for what Jesus has done for us? You see I believe that is where real worship comes from... Worship is born from those of us who know we have sinned; who know what Jesus has done for us. Jesus did not deny the woman's reputation or character. Jesus did not minimize her sin. Jesus did; however, look at her heart...

For too long the church has put out the impression that you had to be perfect to come to church or that once you came in the door. You have to be living right to be worthy of the house of God.

The church is a lifeboat not a cruise ship

Today if a prostitute on drugs came into this sanctuary and knelt at the altar weeping to Jesus, would we comment on her rep, the shortness of her skirt or see a child of the King?

If there is one thing to take away from this sermon today, it is this:

Love God with your heart!
Love All People
Hate Sin

Last note... I find it easy to hate sin for two reasons:

- 1) It is against the moral law of God whom I love with all of my heart
- 2) It destroys people lives

If you love people, hating sin is easy...